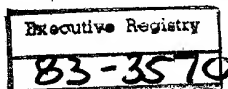




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6.29 pm

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): I do not want to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) into all the minutiae of the questions that he raised. In commenting on his speech, I would only say that had the task force failed to achieve its objective 8,000 miles away from home with no adequate air cover—and well it might have failed—had it transpired that the Belgrano had played a part in preventing the task force from achieving its objective; and had it later transpired that the Cabinet here at home had prevented the sinking of the Belgrano, the Government would have been open to the gravest possible censure. When one is at war, one has to take every opportunity to destroy the enemy when and where one finds him.

Mr. John Morris: Does not the evidence show that the circumstances that the right hon. Gentleman poses are wholly hypothetical? If what he says were true, the situation would be wholly different, but it was not. STAT

Mr. Amery: War proceeds on the basis of hypothesis. One does not know how it will turn out. Clearly, the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not understand the conduct of war. The operation was very risky. We had no certainty of achieving our objective. We had to take every opportunity that we could to destroy the enemy. I see no possible ground, with the islands invaded and the Argentines established on them, on which we could responsibly have allowed any important element of the Argentine fleet to get away.

I was greatly saddened by the speech of the right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr. Powell), on two counts. The right hon. Gentleman has rightly achieved a reputation for having the most logical mind in the House of Commons, yet I found myself unable to follow the logic of the two possible scenarios that he deployed in questioning the rationale of the independent British deterrent.

The basis of the rationale, as I see it, is this. If it is in the power of Britain to destroy 20, 30 or 40 Soviet centres of population, there can be no advantage that the Soviet Union or any other power can gain by attacking this island, conventionally or nuclear-wise, that would compensate for what it would lose if we were to use our deterrent. I cannot see how any rational regime in the Kremlin could order the invasion of Britain conventionally or threaten us with blackmail, if it knew that it was running the risk of unacceptable damage being inflicted on its people by us. That is well within our power. The right hon. Gentleman may think that it would not be rational, and that there would be an irrational element in the attack. It is difficult to conduct an argument of this kind on the basis that one side or the other is irrational. I fail to see the logic in believing that the Kremlin is more prepared to risk the destruction of 20 or 30 cities than we are to commit national suicide. Therefore, in my opinion the deterrent should protect us against that threat.

I am saddened for another and deeper reason. The right hon. Gentleman is a great patriot. Of course, the analogies with 1940 are not consistent. The situation now is very different, and the nature of the weapons has greatly increased their destructive power. However, what I heard him say just now was reminiscent of what many patriotic Frenchmen said in 1940, not least the hero of Verdun.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) urged that we should put the British and French nuclear

views were sought and taken into account?

I have tried, I hope coolly and clinically, to sift the wheat from the chaff on this issue. I have tried to discover the answer to my own questions. I have tried to reconcile what is apparently irreconcilable. It would be a very serious matter indeed if serious doubt remained that the single act of changing the policy on firing at such short notice, with extremely limited consultation, resulted in a substantial acceleration of the war and subsequent loss of life on both sides when there were serious hopes that it could have been brought to an end.

Mr. Stanbrook: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: If that were conclusively proved, it would be a national and personal disgrace. I believe that some doubts have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow. I have sought to set them out.

Mr. Stanbrook rose—

Mr. Morris: They will not go away. The highest tribunal is necessary to examine the facts, the state of the deliberations, the intelligence available and, in particular, the log of the Conqueror.

Mr. Stanbrook: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: No. The case that I have made out must be answered.

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[Mr. Amery]

deterrents on the Geneva negotiating table. I do not see the sense of that. We have no capability of overkill; still less have the French. The only countries that have the power of overkill are the United States and the Soviet Union. It is their responsibility to try to achieve a balance of deterrence at a lower level. We cannot make a serious contribution without going below the minimum force that we require to maintain a deterrent of last resort.

The people of this country understand that. Although the right hon. Gentleman for Down, South doubted whether they were convinced of the need for a deterrent, everything that I saw and heard in the election campaign suggested to me that there was a strong feeling that Britain must have its own independent deterrent—I am not talking about any particular system. The President of the United States understands that, and I salute his resolve not to bring the British and French deterrents to the negotiating table. He knows that nothing would do more damage to the cohesion of the Alliance. It was not always so. There have been American Administrations in the past who would have been glad to deprive Britain or France of an independent deterrent. That is not true today. Mr. Andropov may have hoped to tempt the Americans into supporting his proposals and to persuade them to try to establish a Brezhnev doctrine inside NATO. However, President Reagan has been wiser than that, and we owe him a great deal for his staunch stand in the matter.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East said that Trident was a more powerful weapon than we needed. Who is to say? It will not be deployed for 10 years, and it then has to last 30 years. I should have thought that we needed a slight margin of insurance against the development of better defence systems by a possible adversary, or unforeseen developments in the world.

Then there is the matter of cost. Having negotiated many weapons systems with the Treasury, I have little or no doubt that the Argus-eyed Treasury officials would not have allowed Trident to be adopted as our main weapon system if they had been able to prove, even marginally, that it was less cost effective than any other system. I do not have time to go into the details, but I commend to right hon. and hon. Members Lord Lewin's letter in *The Daily Telegraph* on the matter during the election.

I come now to the question of cruise, Pershing and arms control. We in Britain and France have a certain security by virtue of the deterrents that we possess. We are unlikely to be attacked, for the reasons that I gave a moment ago. Western Germany is in a quite different position. The split between Western and Eastern Germany, and the special status of Berlin, obviously inhibit that country from becoming a nuclear power in its own right. It has to rely on the United States. Now, leading Americans in every walk of life, military and political, have made it only too clear that the United States would not expose its own homeland to Soviet nuclear retaliation by seeking to defend its allies outside the United States by striking at the Soviet Union. So there is only one security for the Germans, and that is to have American missiles deployed on German soil—not in the sea, not far away, but on German soil—in support of the American army in Germany. Even that is not a 100 per cent. guarantee, but it is a pretty good one.

The same applies in some measure to us in this country. We have given hospitality, and rightly so, to major

American installations in this country. As has often been pointed out by Opposition Members, these could be targets for the Soviet Union. To prevent them from being targets for the Soviet Union, it is a good thing that our own deterrent should be supported and seconded by American deterrent missiles in this country, backing up the installations that they have already established here.

The talks on arms control at Geneva are naturally conducted in terms of nuclear accountancy—the number of warheads and missiles—but the real argument is about Germany and Europe. It is about the relationship, above all, of Germany towards the Alliance, and of the United States to Europe. If the cruise and Pershing systems were not deployed, what would be the impact on the British Army of the Rhine? I do not know how long my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence would agree to leave the British Army of the Rhine in Germany without the backing of a proper missile system to answer the SS20s. I do not know how long Mr. Weinberger would be prepared to leave the United States Army if the missiles were not deployed.

But, above all, consider the impact on Germany. If the Germans no longer felt secure in NATO, what option would they have except to turn to neutrality and seek reunion with East Germany under Soviet aegis? That would represent an irreversible shift in the world balance of power. Those are the realities behind all the talk about arms control. It is not a question of warheads and missiles but of whether Germany remains in the Alliance, and whether the alliance between the United States and Western Europe holds together.

That was well and truly appreciated at the Williamsburg conference by two leading men who are not in NATO. It was appreciated by President Mitterrand of France, a member of the Alliance but not of NATO, and a Socialist, who underwrote at Williamsburg our general strategy for defence. Perhaps even more significantly, it was appreciated by the Prime Minister of Japan, on the eve of an election—and Japan is the only country which has ever suffered a nuclear strike. I think we must say that it is imperative that we proceed with the deployment of the missiles as well as with the maintenance, development and modernisation of our own British deterrent.

We must not conceal from ourselves the fact that the situation that confronts us is extremely fragile and dangerous—rather more than has appeared as yet in speeches either in the election campaign or in our debate today. For the moment, the Soviets have the edge over the West in Europe, in the middle east and in the far east, but for how long? The cruise and Pershing missiles will be deployed; the American rapid deployment force in the middle east is taking shape; Japan has begun to rearm. Overall, the Western powers are rearming—the Americans at an impressive rate.

There is no way in which the Soviet Union can compete in an arms race with the industrial West—it simply has not the technological or industrial power—but here is the danger; here is the rub that we must not ignore. There must be a strong temptation to the Soviet Union to take advantage of the window of opportunity that is still open to it before it closes, and to try to gain some assets while it can, whether in Europe or in the middle east. It is a very dangerous situation and we have brought that danger on ourselves—especially the United States under President

Carter's regime—but the danger is there and there is no way that we can avoid it. To hesitate would only encourage Soviet expansion.

I agree that to go forward also has risks, but even at the height of the cold war, in 1955, suddenly the Soviets gave way on Austria and we had the Austrian treaty. So while there are dangers in going forward with our plans, there is a much greater danger in running away from them. We do not know exactly what is happening on the other side of the hill.

Plainly, there must be no provocation, but patiently and resolutely we must go forward with our plans, both to defend ourselves and to help those countries and movements which are on our side and are our friends. We have to convince Moscow that we shall not accept Soviet imperialism as a valid and legitimate element in the world. If we succeed in doing that—it will not be easy; it will call for great patience and resolution—internal pressures inside the Soviet bloc, economic, social and national, may well bring about important reforms and changes in the Soviet system. One would like to think that the Soviet empire could turn into a Soviet commonwealth, with real, not cosmetic, independence, for its different members. Is that wishful thinking? Perhaps it is, but it is well-nigh certain that weakness or hesitation on our side will lead to inevitable disaster.

6.45 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I have come here to represent a new constituency in the north-west of Ireland. It contains the ancient and historic city of Derry and the town of Strabane. It is a commentary on the politics of the north of Ireland—or the fact that there is a problem there—that never before has someone with either my religious or my political persuasion stood in this House to represent the city of Derry.

I represent an area which has the unenviable distinction of having the highest unemployment rate of any constituency represented in this House, with 38 per cent. in Strabane and 28 per cent. in Derry. Those are statistics which interact seriously and severely with the political crisis in the north of Ireland, because that same area has borne more than its share of the brunt of the atrocities that have taken place in the north of Ireland over the past decade. It is the interaction of the economic situation with the political situation that requires a great deal of attention if the problems of that part of the world are to be resolved.

People have wondered about the rise in the political strength of extremism in the north of Ireland. There is no greater example of the reasons for extremism in that area than that we now have a generation of young people who were only four years old in 1969 and 1970 and have grown up in a society in which they have always seen security forces and violence on the streets, in which they have been continually searched simply because they are young people, and in which, when they reach the age of 18, they have no hope of any employment because they happen to have come of age during the deepest economic crisis for a long time. Therefore, there are resentments, and there are sadistic people who play upon those resentments, point to a British soldier and say, "Get rid of him and all your problems will be solved". That simplistic message has an appeal to young people, and people such as myself and members of my party, who seek to show that the problems are rather more complex, have a difficult task.

If the Government were to take seriously the economic crisis in the north of Ireland and make a sensible and determined attack on the problems of youth employment, they would also be making a determined attack on the problems of extremism.

The debate is about defence and foreign affairs. In the Gracious Speech there is reference to the major issue between Britain and Ireland—the problems of Northern Ireland. It also happens to be one of the most serious human issues facing the House. Having come here after surviving over a decade on the streets of Northern Ireland, I have to say with some bitterness that I do not see much evidence that there are many hon. Members who think that it is an issue of great human concern.

We have been told repeatedly by Ministers, Secretaries of State and Prime Ministers, of whatever party, that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom. We are told by the Prime Minister that we are as British as Finchley.

I should like hon. Members to take any part of the United Kingdom over the past decade and to imagine the following things happening. Imagine 2,000 people being killed on the streets in Yorkshire, 20,000 people maimed and injured, and £430 million spent on compensation for bomb damage; two new prisons built and a third under construction; the rule of law drastically distorted, with the introduction of imprisonment without trial; senior politicians and policemen murdered, and innocent civilians murdered by the security forces and by paramilitary forces. Imagine a shoot-to-kill policy for people suspected of crime being introduced from time to time instead of their being arrested. Imagine jury courts being disbanded, plastic bullets used on the streets and innocent children being killed. Imagine paramilitary organisations engaging in violence and the type of interrogation methods that led to the British Government being found guilty in the European Court of Human Rights being introduced. Imagine hunger strikers dying in prison in Yorkshire and representatives of the paramilitary being elected to this House to represent Yorkshire.

If those things had happened on what is commonly called the mainland, can anyone tell me that those events would not have been the major issue in the general election campaign? Can anyone persuade me that any speech made since that election would not have referred to that issue? However, the only hon. Members who have referred to it were leaders of two parties in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, we are told that we are as British as Finchley.

Does any hon. Member believe that Northern Ireland is as British as Finchley or any other part of what is called the mainland? Do any hon. Members honestly believe that in their hearts? If so, where is the evidence of their concern? The truth is that if every hon. Member spoke his heart, he would say that he has psychologically withdrawn from Northern Ireland. The truth is that Britain has psychologically withdrawn from Northern Ireland. Britain and Northern Ireland would be healthier places if that psychological reality were translated into political reality.

The extent of the problem in Northern Ireland today can be summed up by the desperate indictment of a brick wall that has been built between two sections of the community in Belfast to keep them apart and to protect them from each other. That is happening in what is described as a part of the United Kingdom.

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